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Women's Education: A Reading of Early Malayalam Magazines

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Abstract

This work analyses discussions on women's education (formal and informal) in Malayalam magazines from the late 19th and early 20th century and demonstrates how these discussions were instrumental in imagining a new figure of the Malayali woman. The work provides a cultural history of Malayali women's education through this analysis and probes the nuances of what it meant to get educated for the Malayali women. While developmental discourse on Kerala tends to provide a linear and celebratory account of women's educational progress in the state, this article tries to show that progress was not easy: women had to prove that education was necessary, and that education would not lead them astray, that education would not take them away from the space of the domestic, that women could work in spaces outside the family.

Keywords: Culture, History, Women, Magazines, Education, Kerala, Modernity

Introduction

My project goes back in history to the time of social reform movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries and tries to locate the shaping of the hegemonic culture with relation to women - their position within their families and within the larger Malayali society. It does this through a reading of Malayalam magazines from the early 20th century, particularly the articles on women's

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education[1] and shows how these articles were instrumental in constructing the image of an "ideal Malayali woman" that cut across caste, class and religious groups. The larger aim of the work is to recreate a part of Malayali women's history that is no longer remembered through a reading of these early magazines.

The Malayalam magazines from the early 20th century present a picture of women and education different from developmental discourses, census reports and celebratory accounts of the high literary and educational status of women in Kerala.[2] The construction of Kerala as a model for development started in the mid-1970s with the publication of a variety of reports and articles on the disparity between the low per capita income and high levels of unemployment in the state together with the high levels of literacy and life expectancy, and low levels of fertility and mortality (Lukose, 2009). As I will show in the subsequent sections, the women writers in the early 20th century had to state and prove that education would not lead them astray; would provide them with upward social mobility; was necessary to learn to manage the family; was necessary to train for new jobs like teaching, nursing, medicine, etc. while maintaining the gender-power relations, etc. and developmental discourses/census reports do not capture the nuances of what it meant for these women to get educated.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, women's magazines in Malayalam and other Indian languages provided opportunities for women writers and readers to express their opinions and debate issues that were related to their lives. In her work on Hindi women's journals, F. Orsini (1999) periodizes Hindi journals into two phases: the first from 1890s to World War I, and the second from 1920s to 1940s. In the first period, the focus was on training women in appropriate forms of domesticity. The second period, she calls a "radical-critical phase" (Orsini, 1999: pg. 137). This periodization can be extended to Malayalam magazines too. Till the 1920s, the articles in Malayalam magazines were mostly on the pros and cons of education, the kind of education that women needed, etc. After the 1920s the articles were more on social/political/religious issues like dowry, child marriage, home rule, marriage bills, birth control, etc. and often the hegemonic voices in the magazines took on a radical position with regards to

these issues as I will show in subsequent sections. The magazines were trying to educate Malayali women on these issues by the discussions per se and through debates on the kind of subject matter to be included in girls' curriculum.

There were 30 periodicals being published in Kerala before the turn of the century. The first Malayalam journal *Vijnana Nikshepam* was published from Kottayam (A town south of Kochi) by the Church Missionary Society in 1840. The first women's journal *Keralaliya Suguna Bodhini* was published from Thiruvananthapuram in 1884. From the beginning, the popular magazines of the time, particularly the women's magazines, were interested in the education of Malayali women. Though the magazines did state in their editorials that they were for all women, the articles were often (not always) addressed to a Hindu reader and most often to a Nair woman (Balakrishnamenon, 1915; Kannannair, 1918; Ramanmenon, 1915). But the magazines were read not just by Nair women. The subscription list published on the back cover of some of the magazines show readers belonging to other communities/castes; and the *Mahila* was subscribed in government schools from 1924, so it is safe to assume that it had a mixed readership ("Editorial," 1924). Most of the writers for magazines like *Sharada, Lakshmibai, Mahilamandiram, M.N. Nair Masika* and *Mahila* were upper and middle caste[3] Hindus. However, other magazines like *Vanitha Kusumam, Bashaposhini, Sadhguru, Gurunathan, Maryrani, Mathrubhumi,* etc. had Christian writers too.[4] *Vanitha Kusumam* was radical in its views when compared to magazines that had exclusively Hindu writers. Social scientists like J. Devika and T. Awaya who have done work on the social reform period in Kerala mention that most of the magazines of the period address a Nair woman (Awaya, 2003; Devika, 2007, April 2002). The Nair women appear to assume a position of leadership amongst the Malayali women. In their articles, the Nair writers refer to themselves as Malayali women; and women from other caste/religious groups are addressed or referred to by their religion/caste names and not considered as Malayali women by the Nair writers. This has led many of the social scientists to argue that the modernity[5] of the Malayali women is often based on a 'Nair modernity.' U. Kumar mentions how the term Nair came to refer – in the Nair reform

language – to a site of shared memory and possible collective initiatives (Kumar, 2007). Travancore was dedicated to the Hindu deity of Sri Padmanabha and the Travancore ruler was know as *Sree Padmanabha Dasa* (servant of the Lord Padmanabha). The state was highly orthodox in its ideas of caste pollution, and caste related customs and practices. The highly prized jobs close to the royal family were held by the Nairs (Tharakan, 1984). Many of the aristocratic Nair families were settled in Travancore. The Christians were spread in the rural and hilly regions of the state and the Muslims were only a small percentage of the population in the early 20th century (Ouwerkerk & Kooiman, 1994). The relationship between Nairs and those of other castes/religions were tense and the election and representative government aggravated the caste and religious differences.[6] One can only tentatively put forward that there must have been a convergence of religious identity with regional affiliation/identity happening within the Nair community. Certain groups of Christians, Muslims and the Brahmins had ancestors from outside Malayalam-speaking regions. These groups had also imbibed customs and traditions which to outward appearances would seem like 'foreign' and not 'native'. Numerically the Nairs and the Ezhavas were the largest groups in the whole of Kerala. But, as a result of the continuing caste pollution rules,[7] the Ezhavas were not in a position of hegemony. They also gained access to education and other modern institutions in large numbers only towards the middle of the 20th century. All of the above mentioned causes could have been the reason for the Nair women writers presenting themselves as 'the Malayali women.' This in turn led to the emergence of a hegemonic image of the "ideal Malayali woman" strongly influenced by the caste markings and customs of Nair women.

A reading of the magazines that includes *Vanitha Kusumam* provides a different picture. The articles were addressed to a wider variety of middle class readers. There are fewer articles on the system of matriliny, the power of the matrilineal uncle (the head of the family), the Nair-Namboothiri marriage contracts, etc. – all of which were issues that had direct bearing on the Nair women. The examples and references, in *Vanitha Kusumam,* include characters and incidents from the Bible, and mentions Arab, Egyptian, Roman

and Israelite customs. For instance a writer (probably Christian because of the strong use of Christian motifs and examples in the article and the absence of references to Hindu myths) in an article on "Greatness of Hair," mentions the biblical character, Samson and how his strength was located in his hair (K.M., 1927).[8] This in turn leads one to surmise that there were caste/community/religious groups, other than the Nairs, who had a strong influence over the cultural sphere. These groups then challenge the hegemony of the Nairs and their right to represent and stand in for all Malayali women.

Many of the male contributors to the magazines are known even today, but not the women contributors. The men were well known poets, novelists and essayists of the time like Ulloor S. Parameshwara Iyer, Vallathol K. Narayanamenon, R. Eshwarapilla, E.V. Krishnapilla, etc. Of the women writers, some were doctors; some had a BA degree, some teachers and school inspectress. The women's magazines had contributors from other parts of India - Muthulakshmi Reddy, a contributor to *Vanitha Kusumam,* was a doctor, social reformer and the first woman legislator from Madras Presidency. There were a few articles published in English and often contributed by writers from other states in these magazines. There were also excerpts from other language newspapers/magazines.

In the following sections of this paper, I pick up a few concepts that were used in conjugation with the debates on education to show how the figure of the ideal Malayali woman was constructed by these magazine writers in their articles.

Education and Sthreeswaathandryam

When arguing for the need for women's education, in the early decades of the 20th century, the writers had to state that it would not lead woman astray, and that they would not misuse *sthreeswaathandryam.* The term *swaathandryam* originated from the *Smritis,* and meant taking responsibility for one's actions.[9] The term came to acquire the meaning of independence as opposed to *parathandryam* (loss of independence). According to linguists, in the early 20th century the concept could mean various things: arbitrary

power, not bowing down to somebody else, or coming into one's own (Gundert, 1992; S. G. P. Pillai, 1987).

Sthreeswaathandryam was related to independence (for women) from traditional roles within the family. Women's movements around the world after World War I found resonances in Malayalam-speaking regions. A few of the radical thinkers were hoping for the same kind of freedom for Malayali woman as her Western counterpart. This was couched in the language of utility: women needed education to be capable of taking over the reins of the family and society if the need ever arose.

> If Kerala had to face such a situation! God! Let it not happen! Imagine? Are our women of any use? … They have been brought up in the kitchen, which has made them useless. …Why (say) more, it is important that women be allowed rightful *swaathandryam* (Pachiamma, 1921, p. 110-111).

The concept of *sthreeswaathandryam* appears to be a melange of myth, common sense and utilitarianism. The concept seeks to find its roots in Hindu texts and Malayali culture, particularly the upper class position of the Hindu writers. Mythological figures like Sita, Damayanthy, and Savithri, who purportedly enjoyed *swaathandryam*, were invoked to show the historical roots of this concept. The writers do not seem to question whether some of these women were indeed real life women or just literary characters. These women were given authenticity because they had been handed down by tradition.[10]

Sthreeswaathandryam included in its ambit elements of modernity. If education was leading people to be unrestrained, to be selfishness, to blatantly disregard customs/rituals, etc. then education was neither necessary nor desirable according to orthodox thinkers/writers.

The crux of the diatribe against *sthreeswaathandryam* and education was development of individualism.[11] The detractors of *sthreeswaathandryam* feared that this individualism could degenerate into selfishness and egoism, where the women/man would place their self-interests and desires above that of the

community. According to J. Devika the purpose of modern education (in the 19th and early 20th centuries) was the development of a self with a focus on interiority (Devika, 2002). She goes on to say that prior to attaining this state, one was to undergo a training process through which capacities inherent to human beings, determined by sexual endowment of the body, as well as the ability to regulate oneself were to be developed. *Swaathandryam* in this formulation was pitched against *tantonnitam* (doing-as-one-pleased). *Swaathandryam* could not transgress the separate domains of 'Man' or 'Woman'. Devika defines the notion of *swaathandryam* related to women to mean "self-means for survival". My reading of the magazines suggests that terms like *swaathandryam* were not fixed in their meaning. They evolved and changed over time. I would like to extend Devika's argument to say that *swaathandryam* was problematic because it was also seen as developing a self/individual opposed to her/his community and caste identities; and the problem with education was that critics believed it would lead women to ask for *swaathandryam* from lifestyles/dressing styles, etc. connected to their caste positions.

Swaathandryam gained through education was simultaneously used to refer to financial security and the absence of authority figures. It entailed duties; responsibilities towards the family and society that one had to take up to be eligible for it (K.L.P., 1933). The term is used in so many ways that it is difficult to pin-down one particular strand. What needs to be noted here is that *sthreeswaathandryam* gained through education was seen as problematic and the writers proposed that it should not be limitless or overtly imitative of the Western kind of independence/freedom.

Education and dress reforms

Another important aspect of women's lives which was perceived as being connected to modern education was dressing styles. Different styles of dressing distinguished various castes and religion in 19th century Kerala.[12] These signs had to be maintained strictly. The differentiating function continued in to the 20th century too. Clothes were increasingly acquiring the qualities of civilization, modesty, decency, and culture. The magazine writers mention the changes in women's clothing and use of jewellery.[13] It was not just imitation of

the West that was under the scanner but any kind of fashion – Tamil, Parsi, and Bengali - that was seen as imitative was criticised by the magazine writers (Kavamma, 1913).

Simplicity/plainness in dress would have been familiar or the norm for most Malayali women. With access to the new schools and jobs, many of these groups were switching over to the Brahmo/ Parsi sari which was more colourful. The changes were often mentioned in a negative vein - as being an expensive taste and overly imitative of the West and other groups in India. Hindu traditionalists continued to consider wearing a jacket/blouse as arrogance and impropriety on the part of the younger generation even during the 1930s. The younger generation, especially the writers, had to prove that wearing the new dress/sari was neither a sign of dissolution nor immorality (R.P., 1921b). They give examples of members of the Brahmin community and people outside Kerala wearing blouses/jackets to substantiate their point (Lakshmiamma, 1906). The writers supporting the new dress reform resorted to using arguments couched in utilitarianism, custom and propriety. Clothes and jewellery were also related to the concept of *sthreeswaathandryam: sthreeswaathandryam,* to its critics, included the freedom/ability of educated women to adopt the dressing styles of other communities. And since dress was a marker of caste, by extension *sthreeswaathandryam* also challenged certain aspects of caste.

Education, culture and virtue

Other concepts that were frequently read by the magazine writers as being related to women's education were culture and virtue. This can be illustrated through the discussion of a feedback form distributed by *Vanitha Kusumam* in 1927 to find out the qualities of a model woman ("Mathreka Vanitha malthsara pareeksha," 1927). In the write up on the results, the majority of readers mentioned the need to have faith in God and patience as the most desirable virtues for women. The most undesirable qualities were love of money, worthless entertainment, and extravaganza. The need for religious teaching in schools was repeated by many writers of the time. The schools run by Missionaries in Kerala during the early 20th century had scriptural teaching/catechism. Since there were

protests against this in various sites and the native governments came to see scriptural teaching/catechism as a tool for proselytization, they started to control religious teaching in schools receiving grant-in-aid (Gladston, 2006; Kawashima, 1998). It was following this period that the need for moral education was raised by many of the writers in the magazines. The need to curb ostentatiousness in daily life was repeated by many writers and the readers reiterate this when they list it as a negative quality. The nationalists were questioning the necessity of jewellery and the silk clothing favoured by members of the upper class and upper caste all over India. Gandhian ideals of economic self-sufficiency and limited consumption were at the heart of these directives/ suggestions.

Since aspects of culture were an important bone of contention, music another marker of culture was a topic that was discussed often (Harisharma, 1921; R.P., 1921a; Rukmaniamma, 1922). Music was also part of the curriculum in many of the schools, and considered a skill women needed to have. Moreover, training in music was presented as enabling women to make a living out of music teaching. Thus, a traditional art form or cultural accomplishment was given the additional charge of being a useful skill. But, music was not an acceptable part of women's education to all writers (Rukmaniamma, 1922). Further, not all kinds of music were considered suitable. From the writings it is clear that it was not just the British and/or Western influence that was receiving attention and/or disapproval, but also cultural practices from other parts of India. Not all the practices were looked down upon with disapproval and not always.

Another curious fact is the absence of female Malayali figures as role models in the magazines from the period. A couple of the Malayali women mentioned are Queen Rani Lakshmibai,[14] and Manorama Thampurati.[15] One possible reason for this absence is that some of the historical figures like Unniarcha[16] were fighters. The other female role models introduced in the magazines were usually from a distant Indian past (with a few exceptions like Sarojini Naidu), and a handful of English women like Florence Nightingale.[17] With the native governments keeping a tight rein on the printing press (*History of Press in Kerala*, 2002) and since

Malabar was under the British, women and men with a history of violence against the British were not presented as role models in the magazines. Furthermore, the qualities that were appreciated were the softer qualities of compassion, generosity, chastity, kindness, spirituality, etc. Figures like Unniarcha would not fit in with the soft qualities that were seen as feminine, natural and needed for the then modern Malayali woman. The omission of certain categories/types of women from the list of model women in the magazines works in an inverse manner in the formulation of the ideal Malayali woman.

Sthreethwam and sthreedharmam

Two of the most discussed concepts in articles pertaining to women in the early 20th century were that of *sthreedharmam* and *sthreethwam.* What exactly is *sthreedharmam?* The word is from the Sanskrit term *dharma,* and was used to mean 'that which holds' for a social group. According to linguists it could also mean justice, law, custom, behaviour, alms, duties, piety, spirit, virtue, Upanishads and *yagas* sanctioned by the Vedas. (Gundert, 1992; S. G. P. Pillai, 1987). In the magazines various writers include a range of duties/activities/ qualities under this umbrella term: duties towards husband, children, parents, relatives and the home. It meant being compassionate, generous, humble, capable, and loving. It constituted having knowledge of money management, good conversation skills, cooking, childcare, gardening, etc. It also embodied one's *sthreethwam* (state of being a woman (S. G. P. Pillai, 1987)) or femininity (V. A. Amma, 1919; Amminiamma, 1933; Chinnamma, 1909; Kalyaniamma, 1905).

Sthreedharmam was action-oriented and not an innate quality. The manner in which the concepts were used in the magazines, *sthreethwam* had more to do with qualities that were understood to be inherent in women - feminine qualities like love, patience, kindness, spirituality, compassion, chastity, humility, etc. Thus, s*threethwam* could not be taught, but education of the right kind would enhance and bring out the *sthreethwam* of women according to the writers. Shinnamallukovilamma, in her article on *sthreethwam,* says that women need education and work; and they can work with men and still protect their *sthreethwam*

(Shinnamallukovilamma, 1931). Reading from a different standpoint it meant women could work if they were careful about retaining and/or acquiring qualities deemed 'Womanly'. But, helping the man did not mean that the woman had the choice of distancing herself from the domestic sphere. There was a demarcation of women's sphere/capabilities/duties and men's sphere/capabilities/duties in a majority of the articles. Women's duties were tied up to activities in and around the home. The *sthreedharmam* of the woman becomes more important than her aspirations and rights. The women and men could not transgress the spheres/activities that were deemed 'Womanly' and 'Manly' without incurring the wrath of the orthodox writers.

In the early 20th century, *sthreedharmam* included education in its ambit, which was not a part of it a century ago since modern education for woman was itself a new phenomenon.[18] Of the many proposals for the kind of education that women needed the following quote from Anandavalliamma (1927) would capture the essence of the arguments:

It would be ideal if the following curriculum could be implemented in women's educational institutions –

1. The medium of instruction for women should be their mother tongue. Then knowledge could be gained without difficulty.
2. Women should have some knowledge of English and Sanskrit.
3. All women should definitely learn Hindi because the mother tongue of Bharat [India] is really Hindi.
4. Women should become experts in *sthreedharmam*, politics, home management, health science, cooking science, needle work, music, and painting.

If women are given training in the above subjects, their health and intellect will increase and they will become true *bharatheeyagrehadharmini* (Indian housewife) (Anandavalliamma, 1927, p. 360-361).

As can be seen from this quote, education for women included a mix of achievements and useful skills.

Nationalism and other women in the Malayali imagination

There was a sense of being part of the larger nation of India in the magazine articles. Other than education, a new aspect of *sthreedharmam* was the woman's role in nation building. She was expected to do this through the rearing of her progeny in a manner that would ensure that the child would become the perfect citizen. She was also expected to help the nation in little ways that she could. Some writers suggested starting small scale industries like weaving, other suggested teaching their less fortunate sisters in rural areas (Bharghaviamma, 1926; Panikkar(Mrs.), ; Sharada, 1927). These small scale industries were attached to the home, and would not physically take her far from home. The influence of the nationalistic movement and particularly that of Gandhi is clear in the writings from the 1920s (Ammukuttyamma, 1928; Kuttannair, 1929; Ramamenon, 1929; Sharada, 1927-28).

The writers constantly compare Malayali women with Western women. Descriptions of women from different countries in the West were given in many of the magazines. There were also articles on women from Asian countries like Japan, Burma, etc. Japan and the West were two frequent points of reference for the magazine writers. Japanese women were almost always positive ideals to be emulated (Aandipilla, 1909; Bhageerathiamma, 1932; Manjja, 1928). Thus, the women readers of the period were aware of not just the Western women, but of the larger world through the magazines.

Women's education and curriculum

By the 1920s it had become generally accepted that women needed education and by the 1930s, women were also thinking of education as providing them the training to enter a profession/learn a useful skill (B. B. Amma, 1936a; Sthree, 1934; Thankamma, 1932). Women were entering government and private service as doctors, nurses, teachers, advocates, school inspectors, etc. – jobs previously reserved for men. Women were simultaneously perceived as moving away from the space of the domestic, some even preferring to remain unmarried. The status quo could not continue; some felt that education had to address this issue.

So, writers voice the need for separate schools for girls (B. K. Amma, 1930a, 1930b). The inherent differences between boys and girls, many writers felt, meant the kind of education imparted to them should also be different. Some felt that this difference would be addressed by including subjects like music, arts and painting. Others did not feel a need to differentiate between boys' and girls' education and some even scoffed at the inclusion of subjects which they thought were useless like music and painting (Rukmaniamma, 1922; Subramanyayan, 1897). It was not that people who thought music and sewing as useless also supported a non-differentiated curriculum for the two genders. Even towards the end of the 1930s, after many women had successfully been part of the new professions, there were arguments against the suitability of certain professions for women. Thus, even though women were getting educated in large numbers and entering new professions, the ideology of the separate female and male spheres lingered. Moreover, the differences between women and men were being maintained in new ways.

Parishkaaram

Parishkaaram is another concept closely related to the image of the ideal Malayali woman in the magazine articles. What was *parishkaaram*? *Parishkaaram* could mean different things - change (positive and negative), development, progress, reform, sophistication, culture (Gundert, 1992; Namboothiri, 1972; S. G. P. Pillai, 1987). *Aadhunikatha* (modernity; something that has come into existence recently (Namboothiri, 1972)) was seen as ushering in *parishkaaram*. In 1905, in an article on women's education, the author mentions that women's education is not a new *parishkaaram* (Amma, 1905). Here it is used in the sense of innovation.

In the Malayalam-speaking regions, while countering what was observed as change, the idea of a homogenised 'tradition' was being formulated. The writers and intellectuals of the time were aware of the difficulty of this proposition and were drawing on various sources - puranas, Mahabharata, Vedas and even figures from Indian history - to put together a tradition. Those who had undergone English education were faulted with imitating the English in manners, dressing and lifestyle. This imitation of the

English came under fire from various quarters and *parishkaaram* took on the meaning of 'change by imitation' in this context. Education was alluded to as one of the harbingers of change. So, *parishkaaram* was directly related to education, though education was only one of the causes.

With the coming of the British and the institution of the British system of education, there was a change in the traditional structures of kinship, caste, community, family, lifestyles, food habits, dressing styles, customs and even within individuals. During the turn of the century there was a perceived rupture within traditional structures of Malayali society. Tradition had to be kept extant in some way and the burden fell upon the newly imagined figure of the Malayali woman. One way of doing this was to delineate *parishkaaram* [taken to mean change] as intellectual, physical and moral. Intellectual *parishkaaram* was seen as needed, but not physical or external *parishkaaram* [culture, customs, dressing].[19] In Malayalam-speaking regions people were advised to embrace literary and scientific aspects of *parishkaaram*. Morality and/or spirituality were proffered as the fort of Indian culture as opposed to the worldliness of Western culture.[20]

There was a sense that women and men were competing for the same resources/jobs/ positions in the family and society. The blame was laid at the feet of *parishkaaram* and modern education. When used in connection with Western culture *parishkaaram* was seen as being instrumental in bringing about a rift. So Malayali women were not to compete with men for the same kind of jobs, especially government jobs (Govindhankartha, 1925; Shankunnimenon, 1909; Sharada, 1927). Many of the government jobs reserved for particular castes were opened up to women by the 1920s and 1930s. But, there was a popular consensus being developed that certain kinds of jobs were more suited to the temperament of women like teaching, or the medical profession. This ensured that women and men were subtly directed towards different career choices.

Health, conjugality, sexuality

The image of the ideal Malayali woman was connected to her sexuality, her state of marriage and her duties within the family in

the magazines. As far back as 1897 (and possibly even before that), Malayalam magazines argued for women's education so that women could have knowledge of matters related to health, nutrition, childcare, etc. (Subramanyayan, 1897). The term Home Science came in to use in the 1920s (in India) (Hancock, 2001). The institution of special subjects for women, especially Home Science implied that both the woman and the home could be modernized using natural scientific principles (Hancock, 2001). But by stating that women needed to study these subjects to be better mothers/wives/hostesses, Home Science denaturalized the link between women and domesticity; domesticity was no longer an inherent talent/skill of women. Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* was published in 1927 and this had heightened the Indian awareness of scientific and hygienic medical practices (Sinha, 2007). Malayalam magazines from 1927 and beyond have critical references to Mayo and her work (Ramamenon, 1929; Thomas, 1928). Child health and maternal health were matters of utmost public concern. The period saw discussions about the increasing population growth, women taking control of their body and planning the family (Kurup; Parameshwaranpilla, 1935; Sangar, 1934). The manner in which it was discussed birth control was not a matter of choice for the woman. In the magazines of the time, the discussion on contraception and birth control come up as early as 1929 (after the publishing of *Mother India*).

Instilling a sense of discipline to the body and mind of the young girl and the young woman was an important aspect of re-fashioning her *sthreedharmam*. [This was also true for boys and men and not exclusively related to women]. The model individual was one who was seen as having control over one's body, thoughts and words. The inclusion of drill and the directives to include exercise into the daily regime of women were part of the disciplining of the body (Bose, 1929; Ramamenon, 1929; Shankunninair, 1921). Education was proposed as providing the necessary training to discipline the mind and to inculcate good habits.

A tangential aspect related to maternal health and women's health was the increasing number of female suicides that were taking place in Kerala (according to the magazine writers) at the time (B. B. Amma, 1936b; Reddy, 1927). While not directly related to the

construction of the ideal Malayali woman, the increasing numbers of suicides reported among Malayali women were nevertheless read as being related to the change in educational status and the change in women's ambitions/desires/hopes. Radical writers like Amma (1936b) and Reddy (1927) do not glorify women's work/chores (unlike the majority of other writers) in their writings and alluded to the gap between what women expected and what their reality was in their articles. To these writers education was making women realise that they were being treated unjustly within the marriage. The so-called increase in suicides perceived by the writers could well have been the beginning of a trend in women's condition/status - according to current socio-economic reports, Kerala is among the states with the highest rate for crimes committed against women (molestation and cruelty at home) and increased cases of depression among educated women (Mungekar *et al*., 2008). According to a report by E. Mohamed and others cited in Mungekar *et al*. (2008) violence and mental distress are serious problems in Kerala, which has elicited social concern and the need for intervention. The same report mentions that in a micro level study among the survivors of attempted suicides, more than half were women.

Conclusion

What is lacking in these descriptions (from the early 20th century) of a woman and her duties is a space for her as an independent entity: her agency or sense of self was directed towards the needs of the family and the nation. The development of self in the Western narratives of womanhood, which was demonstrated by the protests the Western woman led against the authorities for temperance, wage parity, the Suffragette movement etc. was looked at with fear and suspicion because these were seen as disruptive. These would have taken the Malayali woman out of her home. The Hindu writers (from the matrilineal communities) of these magazines also had the added task of trying to come to terms with a new conjugal unit of the family, where the woman and man had moved out of their natal families. The children were taking the names of their father; the wives were taking the names of their husbands – both new and different from custom. The nuclear family was too new

and tenuous, and at that juncture in history it would have been seen as a double betrayal by the woman if she had asked for the recognition of a self that placed itself above the needs of the family. The first betrayal would have been the woman moving away from what was seen as her traditional roles/duties in the joint family. For the patrilineal families as well, the nuclear family was a new phenomenon and the energy and time of the woman was absolutely necessary to run the household smoothly.

It is difficult to argue for a single position regarding many of the issues discussed in the magazines as very often there were writers who expressed contradictory opinion to what was generally proposed – dissident voices within the hegemonic image of the ideal Malayali woman. Education for the Malayali woman was not a linear process of progress as I have tried to show through this discussion of the education debates in the Malayalam magazines. Women were closely bound to domestic structures than before and education was seen as essential to this process. The kind of employment/industry that was put forward as being suitable for women were the ones that utilized their 'womanly' qualities and/or kept them closely connected to their domestic duties, their *sthreedharmam*.

The articles in women's magazines are useful in tracking the changes that took place in the social and cultural milieu of 19th and early 20th century Kerala. The subtle shifts in the nature of the arguments, the references to happenings, meetings, conferences, etc. capture a history for posterity that is not available in the standard history books. Women's magazines are also the only way in which women's history in Kerala can be tracked to some extent. Unfortunately, the well-preserved and popular magazines from the 19th and early 20th centuries are mostly written for and by the hegemonic caste/class groups, and the history that is available through them is also about this group. There are certain qualities that are common to the model women put up for consumption by the readers: chastity, obedience, education, domestic capabilities, modesty, altruism, courage when required, prudence, self-effacement and beauty. These qualities are represented as being present in women from various locations, time, class, caste, community, and stages of life. This representation of the figure of

woman gains hegemony over time and becomes ensconced as the image of the ideal Malayali woman.

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[1] Of around 460 articles collected from various magazines published in the early 20th century, 80 were specifically on education and most of the other articles more or less referred to women's education in some capacity.

[2] According to the 2011 census reports, the literacy rates for Kerala were 93.91% and female literacy rates were 91.98%. (*Table 4 - Population in the Age-Group 0-6, Number of Literates and Literacy Rate for State and Districts : 2011*, 2011)

[3] The four varna system manifested in a complex pattern in Kerala. The Nairs and the Syrian Christians were considered equivalent to the Sudras. They also acted as the warrior castes on occasion. They sometimes had better access to education and material goods than many other castes including Brahmin castes. Therefore, I prefer to use the term middle caste to refer to Nair and equivalent castes. Ezhavas were lower in the social rung and were considered polluting castes by the Nairs and Namboothiris. Ezhavas and other untouchable castes are referred to as lower castes in this article.

[4] None of the 465 articles I have collected from various magazines has Muslim writers. This is not to say that Muslim women did not write in the magazines. There was only one Muslim women's magazine listed in the administrative reports. Unfortunately, I was not able to get a copy of the same.

[5] Modernity in the context of Malayalam-speaking regions was different from the Western variant. The writers regarded modernity as coming from the West through contact with the coloniser and modern education. It includes institutions like schools, hospitals, law courts, administrative system, revenue system, public works department, etc. brought in by the British. Literary critics use the term *navodhanam* to refer to Malayali modernity, which was more a movement in literature away from Sanskrit texts to new forms like the novel and the short story and revival of older literary forms like the drama. Social, cultural and political critics see this period as an amalgamation of different strands of thoughts like Humanism, Rationalism, Liberalism, Marxism, monotheism, etc. For more details see: (P. G. Pillai, 2004). In this work modernity means all of these and also has the additional meaning of being progressive and amenable to Western influences in culture, art, lifestyles, familial relationships etc.

[6] The Sri Mulam Praja Sabha was the legislative assembly to which members were mostly elected. The Nairs were only 16% of the population, but held the majority of the elected seats. The different Christian communities were around 31% and the Muslims were around 7% of the population. For more details see: (Kooiman, 1995)

[7] Kerala had strict rules as to the kind of clothes and food that the different castes could use; the spatial distance different caste groups had to keep from each other; and even the notion of sight pollution until the early 20th century. For details on caste pollution rules see: (Kurien, 2002)

[8] *Vanitha Kusumam* also had the largest circulation figures among the women's magazines (2000-3000 copies compared to 1400 for the next most popular women's magazine *Mahilamandiram*).

[9] There has been no scholarly work done on etymology in Malayalam language. The etymology of the words *sthreedharmam, sthreeswaathandryam* and *parishkaaram* were provided by Prof. T.B. Venugopala Panicker, retired Head of the Department of Malayalam, Calicut University.

[10] Tradition is defined as the handing down of knowledge or the passing on of a doctrine or technique. Tradition changes in the process of handing down though it is commonly perceived to be frozen and static. In this work it is used to refer to customs and practices peculiar to Malayalis that existed right before the advent of modern education. For details see: (Thapar, 1998)

[11] Individualism is used in the sense of a moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that makes the individual its focus. For a detailed analysis of individualism see: (Audi, 1999)

[12] Travancore had witnessed the "Breast-cloth movement" in the 19th century when women from the Shanar community asked for the right to wear an upper cloth. The lower caste women started wearing their clothes/accessories imitating the styles of the upper caste women under the influence of the missionaries and this caused a furore among the upper and middle castes. For more details see: (Aiya, 1906; Devika, 1999, 2002)

[13] Plain white clothes were the traditional dress of the Christian communities (who were statistically a major group in Travancore and Cochin areas). The upper and middle class/caste Hindu communities were used to wearing plain white clothes with gold/coloured border. The Muslims women also wore light coloured blouses/jackets with their *mundu* (a piece of cloth worn at the waist like a *dhoti*). This information was provided by friends (and their grandmothers) belonging to various religious communities in Kerala. In her

autobiography Devaki Nilayangodu also mentions that the Namboothiris and the Nairs generally wore plain clothes. For details see: (Nilayangodu, 2008)

[14] Rani Lakshmibai was the ruler of Travancore as regent for her nephew, Sri Chithira Tirunal from 1924 to 1931.

[15] Manorama Thampuratti was a Sanskrit scholar who lived in the eighteenth century. She belonged to Kizhakke Kovilakam of Kottakkal, a branch of the Zamorin dynasty in Kozhikode. She was well known in Kerala as a gifted poet.

[16] Unniarcha was a legendary warrior from North Malabar mentioned in the oral narratives, *Vadakkan Pattukal*. She is a popular character in Kerala's folk narrative.

[17] Women like Christabel Harriette Pankhurst (1880–1958) were also mentioned. This was done to show a contrast between radical English women and Malayali women. She was a suffragette born in Manchester, England and a co-founder of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

[18] Modern schools for women started in the early 19th century with the advent of the missionaries. It was only by the late 19th century that the government schools started to be opened to women from different castes/communities. However, it was only in the early 20th century that schooling and modern education really took off. For details see: (Gladston, 2006)

[19] This dichotomy of the spiritual East and material West in public discourse in colonial India has been mentioned by other scholars. See: (Chatterjee, 1989; Veer, 2001)

[20] It should also be noted here that writings in the magazine *Lakshmibai* appear to use the term in the negative sense more often than other magazines. This magazine had a male editor and was published from Thrissur, often called the seat of culture/literature in Kerala.

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